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ABSTRACT

This report presents results of a 1997 survey of the governing boards of independent colleges and universities conducted to identify trends in membership and board policies and practices. Among the highlights are the following: (1) boards average 30 members; (2) 46 percent of boards had conducted a review of their own performance within the past five years; (3) the percentage of males on boards has declined since 1985; (4) the racial and ethnic composition of boards has not changed significantly since 1985; (5) 38 percent of all trustees are aged 50 to 59; (6) almost 42 percent of trustees are business executives; (7) approximately 3 percent of trustees serve as members of other college boards; and (8) approximately 7 percent are members of corporate boards and 11 percent serve on other nonprofit organization boards. Analysis of the 364 responses are presented in text and graphics. Data covers board size and member characteristics, including gender, race/ethnicity, age, and primary occupations. Data on board policies and practices are presented for the following aspects: required members, members serving on other boards, length of terms and limits, meetings, and performance reviews. (DB)

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Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges

# Composition of Governing Boards of Independent Colleges and Universities, 1997

BY HOLLY MADSEN

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# Composition of Governing Boards of Independent Colleges and Universities, 1997

BY HOLLY MADSEN

In late 1996 and early 1997, the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges surveyed nearly 1,100 governing boards of independent and public colleges and universities to examine trends in their membership and certain board policies and practices. This report examines the boards of independent colleges and universities.

This survey will be of particular interest to students and scholars of academic trusteeship, but trustees and executive leaders of independent institutions also will find it useful and interesting. (AGB conducted a similar survey on the composition of public college and university governing boards, AGB Occasional Paper No. 37.)

The benchmark data in this survey enable you to compare the composition of your institution's governing board with others of its basic type according to several factors:

- Size
- Race, gender, ethnicity, and age
- Occupation or profession
- Provision of voting trusteeships for the chief executive, faculty, students, and alumni ,
- Other academic trusteeships
- Corporate and other nonprofit directorships
- Length of terms and term-limit requirements
- Number and length of its typical board meetings
- Commitment to periodic performance self-study

The survey will help you to answer this question: How does our board's composition and its membership policies and practices compare with those of similar boards? Indeed, the survey reveals some interesting shifts over the years that your board may reflect.

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE SURVEY RESULTS

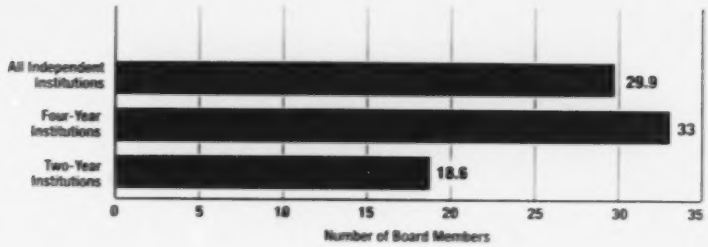
### Boards

- Boards of independent colleges and universities have an average (mean) size of 30 members each.
- The typical board of a two-year single-campus institution has 19 members, while boards of four-year colleges and universities average 33 members.
- Forty-six percent of independent boards had conducted a review of their own performance within the past five years, and approximately the same number employed an outside facilitator to conduct the review.

### Board Members

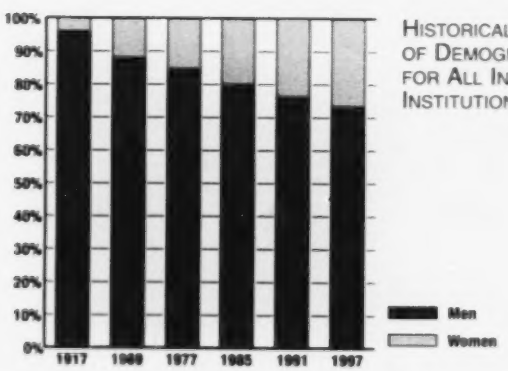
- Since 1985, the percentage of males on the boards of independent higher education institutions has declined from 80 percent to 74 percent.
- The racial and ethnic composition of such boards has not changed significantly since 1985, although the numbers of African Americans on these boards has risen slightly—from 6 percent to 6.5 percent. Nearly 90 percent of all board members are white, 2.1 percent are Hispanic, 1.2 percent are Asian/Pacific Islanders, .4 percent are American Indian, and .2 percent identified themselves as "other minorities."
- Thirty-eight percent of all trustees of independent colleges and universities are between the ages of 50 and 59, more than 9 percent are older than 70, and 5 percent are younger than 40.
- Almost 42 percent of all independent college and university trustees are business executives, while 14 percent describe themselves as members of traditional professions, and nearly 11 percent are educators or students.
- Approximately 3 percent of trustees serve as members of one or more other college or university boards. This represents a significant decline since the 1985 survey, when 10 percent reported serving on more than one college or university board. In the 1977 survey, nearly 21 percent reported serving on multiple boards of higher education institutions.
- Approximately 7 percent are members of corporate boards, and more than 11 percent serve on one or more other nonprofit organization board outside of higher education.

AVERAGE (MEAN) SIZE OF GOVERNING BOARDS OF INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS




DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS: TRUSTEE GENDER

| Gender | All Independent Institutions N=10,083 (percentage) | Four-year Single-Campus (percentage) | Two-year Single-Campus (percentage) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Men | 73.6 | 74.1 | 68.6 |
| Women | 26.4 | 25.9 | 31.4 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |




HISTORICAL COMPARISON OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS FOR ALL INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS—GENDER

## THE CHARACTERISTICS OF BOARDS AND BOARD MEMBERS

### BOARD SIZE

The boards of independent colleges and universities have an overall average (or mean) of 29.9 members and a median of 28 members. Four-year institutions report an average of 33 members (median 32 members), and two-year institutions report an average of 18.6 members (median 19.8 members). Survey respondents reported boards as small as six members and as large as 110. The average board size for all independent institutions has increased by two board seats since 1985.

### BOARD MEMBER CHARACTERISTICS

#### Gender

Almost 74 percent of all board members of independent institutions are men, a decrease of more than six percentage points since 1985. In the 82 years since a similar survey was conducted in 1917, women's board memberships have increased almost nine-fold. Women held 3 percent of the seats on boards in 1917, moving to 12 percent in 1969, 15 percent in 1977, 20 percent in 1985, 23 percent in 1991, and finally to 26.4 percent in 1997. This represents an average rate of growth for women's board membership of .5 percent each year between 1969 and 1997.

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## Race and Ethnicity

The racial and ethnic composition of all independent boards has remained stable over the past 20 years. A large majority of board members are white (89.6 percent), while African American (6.5 percent), Hispanic (2.1 percent), Asian/Pacific Islander (1.2 percent), American Indian (.4 percent), and other minority members (.2 percent) fill the remaining 10.4 percent of the seats on independent boards. The number of African-American board members has increased by 1.5 percent since 1977. The number of Hispanic trustees has doubled since 1991.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS: TRUSTEE RACIAL/ETHNIC BACKGROUND

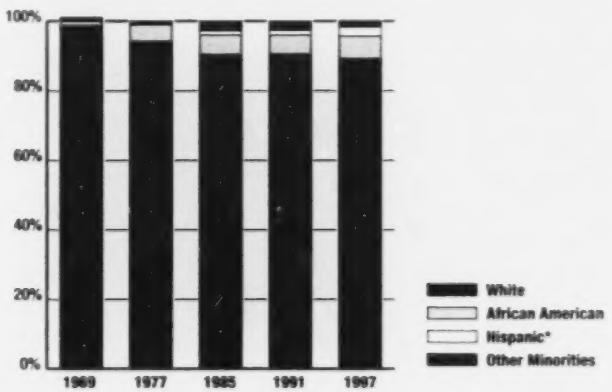
| Race/Ethnicity | All Independent Institutions N=10,083 (percentage) | Four-year Single-Campus (percentage) | Two-year Single-Campus (percentage) |
|---|---|---|---|
| White | 89.6 | 89.7 | 91.9 |
| African American | 6.5 | 7.8 | 3.4 |
| Hispanic | 2.1 | 1.1 | 0.6 |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 1.2 | 1.0 | 0.6 |
| American Indian | 0.4 | 0.2 | 3.4 |
| Others | 0.2 | 0.3 | 0.3 |
| **Total*** | **100** | **100** | **100** |

**Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding.*

HISTORICAL COMPARISON OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS FOR ALL INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS—RACE/ETHNICITY

| Race/Ethnicity | 1969 % | 1977 % | 1985 % | 1991 % | 1997 % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| White | 99 | 94 | 91 | 91 | 89.6 |
| African American | 1 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 6.5 |
| Hispanic | * | * | <1 | 1 | 2.1 |
| Other Minorities | <1 | 1 | 3 | <3 | 1.8 |

**Note: data not available.*

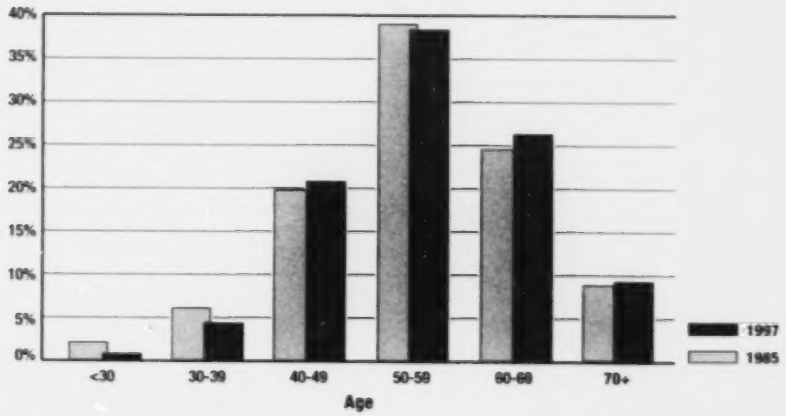


DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS: TRUSTEE AGE DISTRIBUTION

| Age Range | All Independent Institutions N=8,776 (percentage) | Four-year Single-Campus (percentage) | Two-year Single-Campus (percentage) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Under 30 years old | 0.9 | 1.3 | 1.3 |
| 30-39 years old | 4.1 | 4.0 | 3.3 |
| 40-49 years old | 21.0 | 21.2 | 21.6 |
| 50-59 years old | 38.0 | 39.6 | 34.6 |
| 60-69 years old | 26.9 | 25.8 | 26.8 |
| 70 years old + | 9.1 | 8.2 | 12.4 |

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS: HISTORICAL COMPARISON OF TRUSTEE AGE DISTRIBUTION FOR ALL INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS

| Age Range | 1985 % | 1997 % |
|---|---|---|
| Under 30 years old | 2.1 | 0.9 |
| 30-39 years old | 6.2 | 4.1 |
| 40-49 years old | 19.9 | 21.0 |
| 50-59 years old | 38.9 | 38.0 |
| 60-69 years old | 24.3 | 26.9 |
| 70 years old + | 8.6 | 9.1 |




## Age Distribution

The largest group of independent college and university trustees is between 50 and 59 years of age (38 percent). Seventy-four percent of board members are 50 years of age or older. The smallest group of trustees is under 30 years of age (.9 percent), and only 5 percent of all trustees are under 40 years old. These figures have changed little since 1985, although the number of trustees age 39 and younger has declined by more than 3 percentage points.

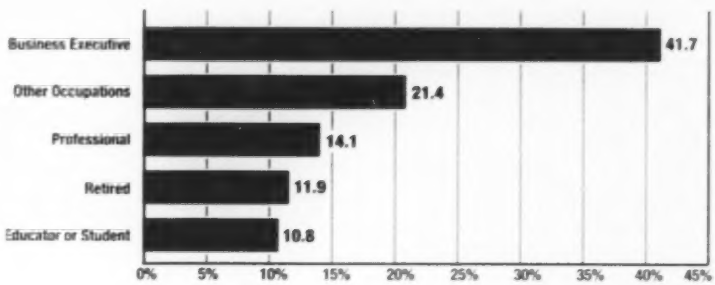
## Primary Occupations

In terms of general occupational groupings, more than half of independent college and university board members fall into one of two categories: business executive or professional. The survey results showed that 41.7 percent of trustees are business executives, 14.1 percent are professionals in various fields, and 10.8 percent are educators or students. An additional 21.4 percent work in "other occupations," and 11.9 percent of trustees were identified as retired, a majority of whom were business and finance executives. Within those broad categories, the survey identified the following specific occupations among board members:

- *Business Executive.* This group increased its ranks by just over 4 percent since 1985. Included are business executives of large corporations (18.2 percent); small-business executives (11.3 percent); executives of banking, financial, insurance, or real estate firms (10.6 percent); and other business executives (1.6 percent).
- *Professional.* The number of board members identified as "professionals" grew by 2 percent since 1985. They include attorneys (7 percent), physicians (3.2 percent), accountants (1 percent), dentists (.3 percent), social workers (.7 percent), psychologists (.2 percent), and other professionals (1.6 percent).
- *Education.* This category has remained stable since 1985. It includes college or university administrators (4.3 percent), college or university faculty (2.9 percent), teachers and administrators of primary or secondary schools (1.8 percent), full-time students (.6 percent), and others in education (1.8 percent).

### Primary Occupations of Trustees

| Primary Occupation | All Independent Institutions N=9,983 (percentage) | Four-year Single-Campus (percentage) | Two-year Single-Campus (percentage) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Business Executive | 41.7 | 46.2 | 43.7 |
| Other Occupations | 21.4 | 17.8 | 23.5 |
| Professional | 14.1 | 14.5 | 11.2 |
| Retired | 11.9 | 11.5 | 14.0 |
| Educator or Student | 10.8 | 9.9 | 7.6 |
| **Total** | **100** | **100** | **100** |




### Comparison of 1997 and 1985 Surveys: Trustee Occupations for Board Members at All Independent Institutions

| Primary Occupation | 1985 % | 1997 % |
|---|---|---|
| **Education** | **11.0** | **10.8** |
| Administrator, College or University | 3.5 | 4.3 |
| Faculty, College or University | 3.3 | 2.9 |
| Teacher/administrator, primary or secondary school | 3.1 | 1.8 |
| Full-time Student | 0.9 | 0.6 |
| Others in education | 0.2 | 1.2 |
| **Business Executive** | **37.6** | **41.7** |
| Large corporation | 13.9 | 18.2 |
| Small business | 12.0 | 11.3 |
| Banking, financial, insurance or real estate | 10.4 | 10.6 |
| Other business executives | 1.3 | 1.6 |
| **Retired** | **9.3** | **11.9** |
| Retired corporate or financial officer | 4.7 | 6.2 |
| Professional | 2.2 | 2.6 |
| Retired Educator | 1.2 | 1.8 |
| Any others | 1.2 | 1.3 |

| Primary Occupation | 1985 % | 1997 % |
|---|---|---|
| **Professional** | **12.1** | **14.1** |
| Attorney | 5.9 | 7.0 |
| Physician | 2.8 | 3.2 |
| Accountant | 0.9 | 1.0 |
| Social Worker | 0.3 | 0.7 |
| Dentist | 0.5 | 0.3 |
| Psychologist | 0.2 | 0.2 |
| Other professionals | 1.5 | 1.6 |
| **Other Occupations** | **29.1** | **21.4** |
| Clergy | 14.3 | 10.0 |
| Administrator/executive of a nonprofit organization | 4.0 | 3.6 |
| Homemaker | 4.8 | 3.1 |
| Artist, writer, or musician | 0.6 | 0.6 |
| Government official, elected | 1.1 | 0.6 |
| Government official, non-elected | 1.0 | 0.6 |
| Farmer or rancher | 0.7 | 0.5 |
| Journalist | 0.6 | 0.3 |
| Skilled or semi-skilled worker | 0.4 | 0.2 |
| Others | 1.6 | 1.8 |

TRUSTEE OCCUPATIONS (IN DETAIL)

| Primary Occupation | All Independent Institutions N=9,983 (percentage) | Four-year Single-Campus (percentage) | Two-year Single-Campus (percentage) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Education** | **10.8** | **9.9** | **7.6** |
| Administrator, College or University | 4.3 | 4.4 | 1.7 |
| Faculty, College or University | 2.9 | 2.7 | 3.4 |
| Teacher/administrator, primary or secondary schools | 1.8 | 1.7 | 1.4 |
| Others in education | 1.2 | 0.4 | 0.6 |
| Full-time Student | 0.6 | 0.7 | 0.6 |
| **Business Executive** | **41.7** | **46.2** | **43.7** |
| Large corporation | 18.2 | 23.2 | 12.9 |
| Small business | 11.3 | 10.1 | 17.1 |
| Banking, financial, insurance or real estate | 10.6 | 12.0 | 9.8 |
| Other business executives | 1.6 | 1.0 | 3.9 |
| **Professional** | **14.1** | **14.5** | **11.2** |
| Attorney | 7.0 | 7.5 | 7.3 |
| Physician | 3.2 | 3.6 | 1.1 |
| Accountant | 1.0 | 0.7 | – |
| Social Worker | 0.7 | 0.8 | 0.6 |
| Dentist | 0.3 | 0.2 | 0.3 |
| Psychologist | 0.2 | 0.2 | 0.3 |
| Other professionals | 1.6 | 1.5 | 1.7 |
| **Other Occupations** | **21.4** | **17.8** | **23.5** |
| Clergy | 10.0 | 7.0 | 1.7 |
| Administrator/executive of a nonprofit organization | 3.6 | 2.4 | 9.5 |
| Homemaker | 3.1 | 3.4 | 4.2 |
| Artist, writer, or musician | 0.6 | 0.7 | 1.7 |
| Government official, elected | 0.6 | 0.6 | 1.4 |
| Government official, non-elected | 0.6 | 0.5 | 0.3 |
| Farmer or rancher | 0.5 | 0.3 | 1.1 |
| Journalist | 0.3 | 0.4 | – |
| Skilled or semi-skilled worker | 0.2 | – | 0.3 |
| Others | 1.8 | 2.6 | 3.4 |
| **Retired** | **11.9** | **11.5** | **14.0** |
| Retired corporate or financial officer | 6.2 | 6.6 | 6.7 |
| Professional | 2.6 | 2.3 | 3.4 |
| Retired educator | 1.8 | 1.6 | 1.7 |
| Any others | 1.3 | 1.0 | 2.2 |

• *Other occupations.* The category loosely identified as "other" declined by 7.7 percent since 1985. Occupations represented in this category include artists, writers, and musicians; elected government officials; farmers and ranchers; journalists; and skilled or semi-skilled workers. Individuals from each of these occupations represent less than 1 percent of the total. Nonprofit organization executives represent 3.6 percent and homemakers 3.1 percent in this category. The occupation that sustained the most significant decline was clergy, which fell from 14.3 percent in 1985 to 10 percent in 1997.

• *Retired.* The proportion of independent college or university board members who are retired rose from 2.6 percent in 1985 to 11.9 percent in 1997. Within this group are retired corporate or financial officers (6.2 percent), retired professionals (2.6 percent), retired educators (1.8 percent), and other retired persons (1.3 percent).

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## BOARD POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Many institutions require a specific number or percentage of board members to come from particular constituencies. The 1997 survey identified five constituent groups: chief executives, church members or representatives, faculty, students, and alumni.

### Required Members

About 55 percent of independent boards provide for the institution's chief executive to serve as a voting member of the board, compared with 64 percent in 1991. For four-year single-campus boards, the 1997 figure is 60.6 percent, and for two-year single-campus boards it is 25 percent. About 34 percent of all independent boards require alumni to serve as voting members of their boards (42.6 percent of four-year campuses; only 10 percent among two-year institutions). In addition, 9.3 percent of independent boards provide for one or more students to serve as voting members of the board, and 10.7 percent require faculty members to serve as voting members.

### Members Serving on Other Boards

An average of 3.1 members serve on one or more other college or university boards, and an average of 7.1 members serve on one or more corporate boards. (For boards of four-year institutions, the average is 8.9 percent.) The figures are higher for trustees who also serve on one or more nonprofit organization boards: 11.4 percent for all independents, and 14.2 percent for boards of four-year institutions.

INSTITUTIONS THAT PROVIDE FOR STUDENTS, FACULTY, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, ALUMNI, CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES, AND OTHER REPRESENTATIVES TO SERVE AS VOTING BOARD MEMBERS

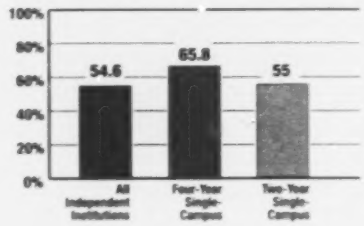
| Group | All Independent Institutions (percentage) | Four-year Single-Campus (percentage) | Two-year Single-Campus (percentage) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Students | 9.3 | 12.3 | 10.0 |
| Faculty | 10.7 | 12.3 | 5.0 |
| Chief Executive | 55.5 | 60.6 | 25.0 |
| Alumni/Alumnae | 34.4 | 42.6 | 10.0 |
| Church representatives | 41.0 | 38.1 | 20.0 |
| Any Others | 10.4 | 12.3 | 15.0 |

VOTING BOARD MEMBERS WHO ALSO SERVE ON OTHER BOARDS

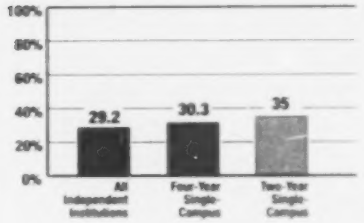
QUESTION: *How many voting members of your board also serve on another college or university board? How many serve on one or more corporate boards? How many serve on one or more nonprofit organization boards?*

| Type of Membership | All Independent Institutions (average number of members who serve as) | Four-year Single-Campus (average number of members who serve as) | Two-year Single-Campus (average number of members who serve as) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Member of one or more other College or University Boards | 3.1 | 3.2 | 1.4 |
| Member of one or more corporate boards | 7.1 | 8.9 | 3.7 |
| Member of one or more nonprofit organization boards | 11.4 | 14.2 | 4.9 |

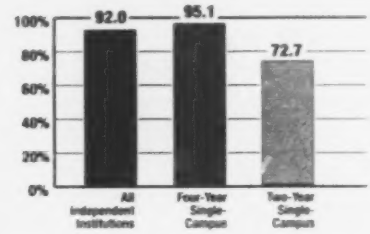
BOARDS THAT LIMIT THE NUMBER OF CONSECUTIVE TRUSTEE TERMS




BOARDS THAT LIMIT THE NUMBER OF YEARS A BOARD CHAIR MAY SERVE




AMONG BOARDS THAT LIMIT TERMS, THOSE THAT PERMIT TRUSTEES WHO HAVE SERVED THE MAXIMUM TERM TO BE REAPPOINTED AFTER SOME PERIOD OF TIME




## Length of Terms and Limits

More than 60 percent of independent boards have policies that set renewable three-year terms for trustees, while another 17.8 percent have four-year terms. Five-year terms are the norm for 8.2 percent of boards, while another 8.2 percent have six-year terms or longer.

More than one-half of all independent boards limit the number of consecutive terms a member may serve. (The figure is 65.8 percent among boards of four-year institutions.) However, 92 percent of boards permit trustees who already have served the maximum term to be reappointed after some minimum period of time—usually after one year. More than 48 percent of independent college and university boards have two-year or three-term limits in place, while 45.1 percent have no term limits. Almost 30 percent of boards limit the number of years a board chair may serve.

LENGTH OF TRUSTEE TERMS

| Term Length | All Independent Institutions (percentage) | Four-year Single-Campus (percentage) | Two-year Single-Campus (percentage) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 to 2-year terms | 3.6 | 3.2 | 5.0 |
| 3-year terms | 60.4 | 60.6 | 75.0 |
| 4-year terms | 17.8 | 18.1 | – |
| 5-year terms | 8.2 | 6.5 | 5.0 |
| 6-year terms | 6.0 | 9.7 | 5.0 |
| Over 6 years | 2.2 | 1.3 | 5.0 |
| No answer | 1.9 | 0.6 | 5.0 |
| Average (mean) term | 3.6 | 3.7 | 3.4 |
| Median term | 3.3 | 3.3 | 3.3 |

TRUSTEE TERM LIMITS

| Number of Terms | All Independent Institutions (percentage) | Four-year Single-Campus (percentage) | Two-year Single-Campus (percentage) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2 term limit | 25.7 | 32.3 | 25.0 |
| 3 term limit | 22.4 | 24.5 | 20.0 |
| 4 term limit | 3.8 | 5.8 | 5.0 |
| No limit | 45.1 | 34.2 | 45.0 |
| No answer | 0.8 | 0.6 | 5.0 |

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### Meetings

Almost one-half of all independent boards meet three times or less annually, and another 32 percent meet four times per year. Nearly 19 percent meet more frequently: 6.8 percent meet five times per year, 5.5 percent meet six times per year, and 6.3 percent report they meet more than six times per year.

### Performance Reviews

Forty-six percent of all independent boards said they had conducted a review of their own performance within the past five years (representing an increase of 1 percent since 1991). Among that group, almost 46 percent employed an outside facilitator to conduct the review. Almost 27 percent of boards have policies requiring periodic formal evaluation reviews. Another 52.7 percent reported that they conduct reviews according to institutional tradition.

AVERAGE FREQUENCY AND LENGTH OF BOARD MEETINGS (IN HOURS)

| Number of Meetings held each year | All Independent Institutions (percentage) | Four-year Single-Campus (percentage) | Two-year Single-Campus (percentage) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1-3 board meetings per year | 48.4 | 49.7 | 20.0 |
| 4 board meetings per year | 32.0 | 37.4 | 35.0 |
| 5 board meetings per year | 6.8 | 7.7 | 15.0 |
| 6 board meetings per year | 5.5 | 1.9 | 10.0 |
| Over 6 board meetings per year | 6.3 | 2.6 | 20.0 |
| No answer | 1.1 | 0.6 | – |
| Average number of meetings per year | 3.9 | 3.6 | 5.4 |
| Average length of each board meeting (hours) | 5.5 | 5.7 | 3.6 |

BOARD SELF-ASSESSMENT

| Practice or Policy | All Independent Institutions (percentage) | Four-year Single-Campus (percentage) | Two-year Single-Campus (percentage) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Boards that conducted a performance review in the past 5 years | 46.2 | 47.7 | 35.0 |
| Among boards that conducted a review, those that employed an outside facilitator | 45.6 | 45.9 | 57.1 |
| Boards with a policy requiring periodic formal reviews | 26.6 | 24.3 | 42.9 |
| Boards that, by tradition, conduct periodic reviews | 52.7 | 52.7 | 28.6 |

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## ABOUT THIS SURVEY

The five-page survey of governing boards of independent colleges and universities consisted of 21 questions, many of which contained additional subquestions. The University of Maryland Survey Research Center conducted the mailing, and Redata, Inc. of Bethesda, Md., tabulated the data. Three hundred sixty-four of the 543 independent college and university boards responded, representing a 67 percent rate of response. Among those respondents, 309 were self-described single-institution governing boards and 49 identified themselves as boards of single-institutions with branch campuses. Because only six described themselves as multicampus or university-system governing boards (1.6 percent of total respondents), data for these institutions are not provided. The group comprises a diverse set of two-year and four-year colleges and universities, theological seminaries, and specialized institutions with a broad range of sizes and missions.

AGB published the results of similar surveys in 1977, 1985, and 1991. The results of the 1997 survey are comparable with the findings of the previous surveys. In some respects, data from independent surveys conducted in 1917 and 1969 also are comparable, although the survey sizes and methodologies differed from the AGB surveys.

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